



Warfighters Discuss Vehicle Performance at Ground Combat Vehicle Conference

Chris Williams



During the final day of the National Defense Industry Association's (NDIA's) Ground Combat Vehicle Conference, held Oct. 12–14, 2009, in Dearborn, MI, U.S. Army TACOM Life Cycle Management Command (LCMC) community members received a rare opportunity to hear directly from the users of the products they work with on a daily basis.

A large, olive-green Stryker vehicle is parked in a motor pool. The vehicle is viewed from a low angle, showing its front and side. It has a prominent metal grille on the front and side, and large, treaded tires. The rear hatch is open, revealing internal components. The vehicle is parked on a paved surface, and other vehicles are visible in the background.

A Stryker vehicle stands mission ready in a motor pool at Camp As Sayliyah in Qatar. Throughout the ground war in Southwest Asia, the Stryker's speed and maneuverability assisted Soldiers in quickly securing cities and performing a variety of operational missions. (U.S. Army photo by Dustin Senger.)

On Oct. 14, 2009, four speakers from various military branches addressed conference attendees, thanking TACOM LCMC associates for the work they put into the Army's ground vehicle systems and giving feedback on enhancements that could increase system capabilities. "To me, this is the most exciting part of this conference because today we have here the patriots who put the red, white, and blue all over the world," stated Panel Moderator MG (Ret.) Julian Burns. "Each of these gentlemen has wartime experience, many with multiple tours. This is about winning battles, and we've got the men here who know how to do it."

LTC Keith Barclay regaled attendees with praise about the Army's fleet of armored and tactical ground vehicles during his deployment to Iraq. Barclay's battalion used a variety of vehicles to complete its mission, including the Bradley Fighting Vehicle (BFV), the M1 Abrams Main Battle Tank, Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles, and High-Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles. Barclay lauded the vehicles' performance, sustainability, and survivability under very challenging environmental and operating conditions, acknowledging that the M1 Abrams was invaluable in penetrating

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city areas while the BFV's maneuverability made it an ideal patrol vehicle. "We could not achieve surprise or match the enemy without the use of our combat vehicles," Barclay commented. "Of the eight Soldiers our unit lost in Iraq, all of them were to dismounted operations—not one was lost in a BFV or a tank during our 15-month deployment."

LTC Scott Leonard, U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, highlighted the importance of Light Armored Vehicles during his time on the Iraq-Syria border. Marines in Leonard's battalion operated more than 465,700 miles and 45,400 hours during their time in Iraq, much of which occurred in the desert, where the Marines lived off the vehicles. Leonard commented that the vehicles performed "magnificently," and he urged the conference to keep survivability in mind when designing future vehicles, but not at the

expense of lethality. "You can design a bubble to put warfighters in, keeping us safe from almost any harm. I truly believe that. But you have to balance that by understanding the turning point where the vehicle is no longer lethal, where the warfighter is put into such a bubble that reduced situational awareness takes away the ability to complete the mission," Leonard continued. "We always want to provide our warfighters with as much protection as we possibly can, but we can never lose sight of the fact that the mission must be accomplished."

COL John Hort provided a dramatic account of how armored ground vehicles saved lives during the battle of Sadr City in March 2008. During this attack, militias from throughout Iraq converged in the city and engaged U.S. forces, firing as many as 86 rocket attacks into the Green Zone. With attacks coming from high-rise buildings and roadside improvised explosive



A panel of warfighters addresses the NDIA's Ground Combat Vehicle Conference and speaks about the role ground vehicles played in completing missions and keeping Soldiers safe. From left: COL John Hort, MSG Brad Kelley, USMC LTC Scott Leonard, 1SG Brandon Barnett, and LTC Keith Barclay. (U.S. Army Tank Automotive Research, Development, and Engineering Center (TARDEC) photo by Chris Williams.)



An M1A1 Abrams tank uses mine rollers to clear a palm grove of landmines in Iraq. Armored and tactical vehicles played crucial roles in penetrating, securing, and patrolling cities throughout Iraq and assisting in operational missions to keep warfighters safe. (U.S. Army photo by SPC Chase Kincaid.)

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devices, smaller lightly armored vehicles were unusable. Hort revealed that in less than 48 hours, his battalion switched from a motorized fleet to one comprised of BFs, tanks, and other armored vehicles. The difference was crucial, as the armored vehicles provided the firepower and support needed to engage the enemy and provided the Iraqi army with the confidence to further pursue enemies after the militias had been driven back and defeated. "The tanks and Bradleys became my bread and butter for protecting our Soldiers so that we could go after the enemy," Hort stated. "The enemy couldn't compete and keep up with our American Soldiers or the technology and the armament protection that we brought to bear."

MSG Brad Kelley rounded out the panel by commenting on the Stryker Combat Vehicle's performance during

an incident on Baghdad's Haifa Street in January 2007. Kelley's battalion received a call that an Iraqi Army battalion commander was pinned down by enemy fire in a downtown area. Kelley's battalion used Strykers to cordon off the street, enabling U.S. Soldiers to move to their positions and safely engage the enemy. Kelley stated that the vehicles' size and speed allowed Soldiers to quickly secure the area. "The Soldiers in the Strykers were the first ones to make contact and faced small-arms fire. They stayed mounted up and moved to their positions, returned fire, held the enemy, and pretty much put down the amount of fire that was coming at them," he explained. "Speed and lethality are key; the vehicle is light and agile and can quickly get where it needs to go. We were able to pick up and move on a moment's notice."

The panelists closed by urging those throughout the TACOM LCMC community to continue providing the best equipment possible, and offered feedback on changes in communications, survivability, and lethality that would allow them to complete missions safely and more effectively. "As a Soldier using today's equipment, you have to look at what you have, do the best with it, and, through lessons learned, look for trends that will continue to make us the most modern, lethal, and nonlethal Army in the world," stated Hort. "Thank you for what you provide to the Soldier. The Soldiers who are still with me today are here largely because of what you provided to them."

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